



# AGE of CTHULHU

## Suicide In The Stacks

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*Age of Cthulhu:* One vs. One adventures are designed for the Keeper to interact with just a single player. Short ‘side quest’ scenarios that can be completed in one or two game sessions, One vs. One adventures are engineered to give the Keeper the freedom to define the details of the mystery and to set it in whatever location or time period that best suits his campaign. Thus they can be set during the 1890s of Cthulhu by Gaslight, the here and now of the twenty-first century, and of course, the default period for *Call of Cthulhu*, the Jazz Age of the 1920s. It would also work well in 1950s and 1960s when jazz and similar clubs were popular. Whatever the period though, all One vs. One adventures are compatible with *Call of Cthulhu, Seventh Edition*.

### BACKGROUND

This scenario opens with the investigator browsing the stacks of a public library in any large town or city. This scenario is written with the assumption that it is set in the Jazz Age of 1920s America, but the Keeper can easily adjust it to fit the modern or gaslight eras. The Keeper is encouraged to work with the player to establish a reason as to why the investigator is in the library. Once established, the Keeper should narrate how as the investigator makes his way between the dark rows of books, he notices how quite the library is. Not just because it is a library, but because there are so very few people currently in the building. In fact, as far as the investigator can tell, he is the only person in this particular section of the library.

Upon entering his intended stack, the investigator discovers a woman on the floor leaning against a shelf, her wrists bleeding profusely from a single slash in each. The sight requires a **Sanity (1/1D3 loss)** roll. The woman is African-American; she’s wearing a clean and seasonally appropriate dress with nice shoes. Lying beside her is a blood splattered razor blade, clearly the weapon used to inflict her wounds, while scattered next to her are three sheets of yellowed paper that appear to be sheet music. Blood spray covers the books and floor in this aisle, but with a successful **Spot Hidden** roll, the investigator will note not the three music sheets.

### American Racial Segregation

Public segregation of white people from people of color only ended with the ratification of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Prior to that, even public libraries were segregated. If the Keeper is running a historically accurate game, then he may want to relocate the site of the suicide to another location, or have the investigator visiting a library normally reserved for ‘colored’ people. During play tests of this scenario, the Keeper hand-waved the restrictions of segregation in public libraries, and it did not appear to adversely impact the enjoyment of the game by the players. Alternatively, the woman who committed suicide, Loretta Herald, may have had to sneak into the ‘Whites Only’ section of the library in order to find the book she wanted. The potential consequences of doing so only serve to highlight the desperate nature of her plight and subsequent actions.

As the investigator enters the aisle, the woman looks up and reaches out to him with a single arm, blood pulsing from the cut in her wrist with every thump of her heart. Whether the investigator rushes to her aid or not, he is able to hear her final words, “No longer can I sing.” Just as she says that, the last of her life-blood is pumped out onto the floor and she goes still.





## THE INVESTIGATION

If the investigator immediately calls for help, then he has only ten minutes before the police arrive to take his statement and collect the woman's body. If the investigator opts to quickly check the crime scene first, then he has about ten minutes before a librarian comes by with a trolley loaded with books. If the investigator is discovered with the body by the librarian, (depending on the exact circumstances of what the librarian observes when she arrives), she is inclined to give a report to the police that supports the investigator as a fellow concerned citizen. Unless he acts oddly or suspiciously, she does not give cause so as to persuade the police into thinking that the investigator is responsible for the woman's death.

### Gender Neutrality & Vague Details

The gender pronoun of 'he' is used throughout this adventure to describe the Keeper and the player's investigator. The city and the predominately black district this scenario takes place in are intentionally left vague so the Keeper can adapt this One vs. One adventure to meet the specific needs of his campaign.

**The Woman's Identification** – A purse or pocketbook is not present on or around the woman's body. No one in the library recognizes her and the police have no idea who she is. If the investigator is a musician, or if the investigator lives in or routinely visits the predominately black district of the city, then the investigator can attempt a **Hard Idea** roll to see if he knows or recognizes the deceased.

The deceased woman is Loretta Herald, a singer who usually performs with a jazz band at The Street, a popular jazz club located in the predominately black district of the city. (For example, The Cotton Club is a club in Harlem, a predominantly black district in New York City.)

If the investigator does not know who the woman is, he will realize that the police may need help disbursing an artist's sketch of her as they try to identify her, (this is a free Idea roll success). If the investigator wants to follow-up with the police, then see **The Police** entry below.

**The Police** – The police precinct closest to the library responds to the call and they will handle the death of Loretta Herald (whether she has been identified or not) as being one of suicide. The investigator will be interviewed at

the scene by the detective in charge of the case, Kenneth Welch. He will take a statement, but otherwise, his questioning will be perfunctory before the investigator is allowed to go. If though, the investigator wants a meeting with Detective Welch at a later date, it will require a successful **Law** or **Persuade** skill roll. If the investigator's occupation is in law enforcement, then he may attempt either skill roll with a **Bonus Die**. Detective Welch is extremely busy and only has a few minutes to speak with the investigator. Detective Welch has a copy of the artist's sketch of the woman on his desk and he informs the investigator that at this time the identification of this woman is not his top priority. Detective Welch reminds the investigator that there is a rash of violent crimes sweeping through the city and the police department is dedicating all of its available forces to stopping these crimes (see the **Current Newspapers** entry below).

If the investigator offers to help, then Detective Welch chuckles under his breath for a second before flicking the head sketch into the investigator's lap. "If you think you can do better, go right ahead," he says. While the investigator is talking to Detective Welch, a clerk drops a sheet of paper onto the desk. Detective Welch quickly reviews the paper and then informs the investigator that the woman's finger prints came in, and she is not in their records. So, whoever she was, she didn't have an arrest record. At that point, Detective Welch asks the investigator to leave so he can get back to the other more pressing police work.

If the police collected the sheet music found next to the body, then those sheets are in a manila folder on Detective Welch's desk. If the investigator asks about the sheet music, the detective shrugs his shoulders and says, "Sure. Have at it. If you find anything let me know, ASAP." However, if the investigator fails to ask about the sheet music, then Detective Welch calls after the investigator just as he is about to leave and says, "Oh, hey. Why don't you take this with you too; it may be of some help. Who knows? If you find anything let me know, ASAP." (See the **Sheet Music** entry below.)

**Current Newspapers** – A review of recent headlines reports a rash of violent crimes washing through the city. While the details differ with each incident, they all have a general pattern; with a successful **Library Use** skill roll followed by a successful **Idea** roll, the investigator can discern the pattern.



- Most of the violent crimes are being conducted by black people, but all of the perpetrators are successful and professional business people who reside in the city's more affluent black neighborhoods.
- None of the perpetrators have any personal history of violent crimes. So far, none of the victims have died from their injuries, but a few are still hospitalized in serious condition.
- All of the crimes were committed spontaneously. In all cases, the perpetrator was engaged in a common activity in the city (for example, walking on a sidewalk, eating in a diner, or doing yardwork).
- All of the crimes were committed with weapons of opportunity that the perpetrator acquired on-the-spot.
- So far, the investigations into these crimes have not identified a single controlling cause or individual behind the crimes. It is as if a large number of people just simply decided that it was a good idea to commit random acts of violence against their neighbors and strangers.

**Violent Crime Perpetrators** – Several of the perpetrators of the recent violent crimes are being held in the local police precinct jail awaiting trial before, most likely, being sent to prison. The three most recent perpetrators are Lyle Davis, Sherman Bozeman, and Russell Cotton. A successful **Law** or **Persuade** skill roll (with a **Bonus Die** if the investigator is in law enforcement) is required to gain permission to see them, although a \$10 bribe will be enough to gain them permission. If given permission, the investigator will be signed in as a visitor and allowed to conduct the interviews with the men in the public visitor's area.

### Acts Of Violence

This scenario is not going to describe any of the suggested acts of violence. If the Keeper and player need to know the details of the crimes, it is up to them to establish those details in their game. Real-life violence can be upsetting for some players in a Call of Cthulhu, and while this scenario does depict a suicide, that particular violent act is included in the title of this scenario so Keepers and players can avoid this subject matter if they so desire.

The three men will be perplexed as to the investigator's interest in their case, but will answer any questions honestly. With a successful **Psychology** skill roll, the investigator can tell that all three men are extremely remorseful for the crimes that they committed. None of them deny committing acts of violence, but none of them have an explanation as to why they did it. If the investigator attempts to use any of the social skills (**Charm**, **Fast Talk**, **Intimidate**, or **Persuade**) during an interview, a successful skill roll indicates that the perpetrator mentions being a member of The Street social jazz club, and that he had been at The Street the evening prior to his act of violence.

If the investigator shows any of the men the artist sketch of the woman who committed suicide in the library, they are able to identify her as Loretta Herald, a singer at The Street. Just before the investigator completes his interview with the third perpetrator, the man grabs the investigator's wrist and staring directly into his eyes, whispers, "Have you seen the Yellow Sign?" The spark of madness in the man's eyes is very obvious if brief and the question necessitates a **Sanity (0/1 loss)** check.

**Sheet Music** – None of the three sheets of music found on the library floor beside Loretta Herald have any blood on them. The sheets appear to be quite old; each is a rigid and yellowing sheet of vellum. None of the sheets are annotated with a title, composer, lyrics, or page numbers. It is impossible to tell what order the sheets need to be in. The sheets are rigid, and any rough handling of the sheet cause small bits of the vellum to flake off.

If the investigator has any musical aptitude, he can attempt a related **Art** and **Craft** skill check, for example, **Art and Craft (Piano)** or **Art and Craft (Sing)**, to read the notes to get a sense of the rhythm and metre. A successful skill check results in a **Sanity (1/1D3 loss)** check. If the investigator is not musically inclined, then a musical expert can be found at a nearby university, community theatre, a church organist, or musical instrument retail shop.

If the investigator finds a music expert to review the sheet music, then after a few moments the expert is noticeably confused by them. With a successful social skill check (**Charm**, **Fast Talk**, **Intimidate**, or **Persuade**), the investigator is able to convince the music expert to attempt to play the music. After a couple of failed attempts to play it, the music expert becomes frustrated with the investigator and demands that he leave immediately. The expert wants nothing more to do with the investigator or the accursed sheet music. The music expert throws the papers back at the in-



investigator causing the fragile sheets to tear apart. Each sheet breaks into at least three large chunks.

### Damaging the Sheet Music

The sheets of music are enchanted to self-repair. The sheets do not repair themselves into a 'like new' state, but any chunks of paper that flake off are miraculously repaired a few hours later. The repair work is much too slow to be seen with the naked eye, but it could be filmed with a time lapse camera. Once the investigator realizes that the sheets of music are repairing themselves a **Sanity (1/1D2 loss)** check is required.

**The Suicide Site** – The investigator may wonder why the woman took her own life in the library and why in that particular aisle. The following clues can be gathered at the site of the suicide:

- That aisle in the library is dedicated to books on Art History.
- With a successful **Spot Hidden** check, the investigator notices a large book that is misaligned with the other books around it.
  - ♦ The title of the book is *The Italian Renaissance of the 13th Century*. Its author is Professor Stefan Install. (If he attempts to contact Professor Install—a lecturer and author of art history at a minor university—the staff informs the investigator that the professor is in Europe on sabbatical and therefore unavailable. The investigator might be able to meet him later, but that is beyond the scope of the scenario.)
  - ♦ One page is dog-eared. Opening the book to that page reveals a large photograph of a painting titled, 'Serenade Over Las Navas de Tolosa'. It was painted in 1217 by Flavio De Luca.
  - ♦ The painting depicts an angelic figure in pale yellow robes holding a small box as she floats over a smoking battlefield. Lying on the ground are the figures of soldiers kitted out for war with armor, spears, and shields. (A successful **History** check identifies the period depicted in the painting as being one of the many skirmishes that occurred after the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa of 1212 between the Christians and

the Moors.) The figures are from two opposing sides of a battle, but they are now all lying down in clear poses of horror, pain, and agony. The angelic figure seems to be a woman, but face is obscured and she appears to be floating just a little bit in the air. All of the figures are dead and dying except for two, one from each side of the battle, who are locked in mortal combat. Each has already stabbed the other, and they are face-to-face, knives raised, in the final moments of their lives.

- ♦ Some of the smoke wafting off the battlefield has curled into the shape of the Yellow Sign. Viewing this symbol in the painting requires a **Sanity (1/1D4 loss)** check.
- ♦ If the investigator does not find the book, it will not hamper him from completing his investigation. If the investigator did not search the aisle prior to the police arriving on the scene, then that area of the library is closed to the public for three days as they clean.

### A Gaslight Music Hall

A Keeper can use *The Street* as a social jazz club in games set in the 1920s or in a modern era, but jazz music did not exist in Victorian London. In a Cthulhu by Gaslight game, *The Street* should instead be a music hall (or vaudeville hall, if set in the USA), a venue which hosts theatrical entertainment involving a mix of popular songs, comedy, and specialty acts. Wherever the Keeper is setting *A Suicide in the Stacks*, *The Street* is not a major venue, being located on a back street on the edge of the city's commercial district. It mostly plays host to minor acts, but does run a members only subscription club for private performances. Instead of Loretta Herald being an American singer with a jazz band, she would be an American singer with a string quartet, perhaps visiting from New York, New Orleans, or even Paris, with interpretations of ethnic pieces from French Africa.



## THE STREET

The Street is a popular social jazz club located in a predominately black district of the city. It is an upscale club, men are required to wear a coat and tie and women are required to wear a fashionable dress. The monthly membership fee to the club is moderately priced for the time period (one guinea in the Victorian era, \$2.00 in the jazz era, or \$20.00 in the modern era). The investigator's reception at The Street depends on the time of day and his race.

**Daytime vs. Nighttime and Race** – The doors to The Street are locked between the hours of 3:00 AM and 9:00 AM. The club opens its doors at 9:00 AM to accommodate the musicians, hosts and hostesses, and cleaning crew. Club members all know that the facility does not actually open to the public until 9:00 PM. So 'daytime' is from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM and 'nighttime' is from 9:00 PM to 3:00 AM. Displayed in the club's marquee windows are posters advertising Miss Loretta Herald as the headlining singer.

If the investigator visits The Street during daytime hours, then no doorman is posted to prevent his entry. Once inside, a club host confronts the investigator to inquire about his business being there at that hour. If the investigator is African-American, then he gets a **Bonus Die** on any social skill (**Charm, Fast Talk, Intimidate, or Persuade**), used to gain entry into the club. An investigator of any other race must attempt this social skill normally.

If the investigator visits The Street during nighttime hours, then a doorman is posted at the front door to ensure that only club members in good standing are allowed to enter. If the investigator is African-American, then he may attempt to use any social skill (**Charm, Fast Talk, Intimidate, or Persuade**), normally. An investigator of any other race must attempt this social skill with a **Penalty Die** applied.

The club has one other entrance at the back of the building that leads to a service alley used for trash collection and deliveries. The back doors are unlocked during daytime hours, but are locked during nighttime hours. The door is never guarded. A successful **Locksmith** skill roll is required to unlock the door.

**The Band Members** – It is possible that no one at the club is yet aware of Loretta's death. The Keeper should keep this in mind as the investigator interviews the members of her band, The Gold Tones. If the investigator meets the band during daytime hours, it is currently on stage practicing. If the investigator meets the band during nighttime hours, it is waiting in the wings to go on stage later. The Gold Tones

will riff a set of their classic instrumental hits if Loretta does not show up for the show.

The members of The Gold Tones are Conrad West on piano, Malcolm Robinson on saxophone, Kirby 'Kirby' Ford II on clarinet, and Wendell Pride on drums. If the investigator is meeting the band less than two days after her death, its members do not know. Regardless of how they learn about her death, if the band members know that Loretta is dead, then the investigator can attempt a **Psychology** skill roll. With a successful roll, the investigator realizes that the band members are conflicted with both grief and relief.

If the investigator presents the sheet music to the band members, they refuse to play the music, and they demand that the investigator take the sheets away.

**Loretta's Dressing Room** – The club concentrates its screening of club members at the front door, so no one blocks the investigator's attempt to go backstage. Once backstage, the investigator finds a hallway lined with doors; each door has a nameplate labelling whose dressing room is whose. One of these is labelled 'Loretta Herald'.

The door is unlocked. Once inside, the investigator finds a small dressing room with a makeup table, mirror, stool, and a rack of elegant gowns. Sitting on the make-up table is a small wooden box. The lid of the box has a brass plate on it that reads 'Cassilda's Song'.

If the investigator opens the box, he reveals a tiny ballerina wearing a pale yellow dress and an unsettlingly cold, blank face. The ballerina begins to twirl as a strange and haunting song begins to play. The investigator must now make an opposed **POW** roll against the music box. The music box has a **POW 85**.

- **If the investigator FAILS the POW roll** – The investigator loses **2D6 Sanity**, and is overcome with a desire to sing a song that seems to be welling up within him. He is absolutely compelled to sing and will join The Gold Tones on stage. Each additional day, the investigator loses **Sanity 1D3**, and can attempt to make an **Extreme POW** roll to break the spell the box has over him. The investigator is forever haunted by the Yellow Sign.
- **If the investigator SUCCEEDS the POW roll** – The investigator loses **1D6 Sanity** as a feeling of being violated washes over him. A vague memory of a song comes to his mind, but he feels thankful that he is quickly forgetting the lyrics. The investigator feels absolute repulsion for the music box.



**The Music Box** – It is up to the investigator to decide what to do with the music box. If the investigator chooses to destroy the box, it is easily done by just smashing it to the ground. The fragile little box instantly smashes to bits upon impact with the floor. Once the box is destroyed, the three vellum sheets of music also crumble away into dust. Once the box is smashed, the Carcosa Beetle inside is released.

The Carcosa Beetle is large, about the size of man’s fist. The creature looks to be a blend of a Jewel Scarab and a Rhino Beetle, with a bright gold and amber carapace over black legs and eyes. The beetle spreads its wings and flies up to the make-up table. Once on the table, the beetle flutters its wings to create a distinct buzzing noise. The beetle modulates the buzz to simulate a voice that says, “Song... No... Silent”, which sounds more like “Zong... Nooo... Zilent.” At which point the investigator must make another **Sanity (1/1D4 loss)** check.

### CARCOSA BEETLE

Composer of musical madness

<i>char.</i>	<i>averages</i>	<i>rolls</i>
<b>STR</b>	10	(1D3 ×5)
<b>CON</b>	10	(1D3 ×5)
<b>SIZ</b>	10	(1D3 ×5)
<b>DEX</b>	10	(1D3 ×5)
<b>INT</b>	10	(1D3 ×5)
<b>POW</b>	90	(5D6 ×5)

**HP:** 1      **Average Damage Bonus:** -1D6

**Average Build:** -2      **Average Magic Points:** 19

**Move:** 3/20 flying

### ATTACKS

**Attacks per round:** 1

**Fighting attacks:** the Carcosa Beetle’s only attack is to burrow into someone’s flesh to take over and control the person like a puppet.

**Fighting (Burrow):** 40% (20/8), damage: 1D4 + damage bonus

**Dodge:** 25% (12/5) flying, 5% (2/1) crawling

**Armor:** the Carcosa Beetle is impervious to all physical damage. It can only be damaged by spells.

**Spells:** None

**Sanity:** 0/1D3

### CONCLUSION

Once released from the music box, the Carcosa Beetle attempts to leave. The beetle will only fight against the investigator if the investigator persists in attempting to attack the beetle. If pushed into fighting, the beetle flies over to burrow into Wendell Pride and begin using him as a puppet to fight against the investigator. Once the Carcosa Beetle vacates a human puppet, that human dies.

### Rewards

Attempting to save Loretta’s life	+01 Sanity
Helping the police identify Loretta	+1D3 Sanity
Destroying the music box	+1D6 Sanity
Releasing the Carcosa Beetle into the world	-1D6 Sanity
Destroying the Carcosa Beetle before it burrows into Wendell Pride	+1D3 Sanity



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